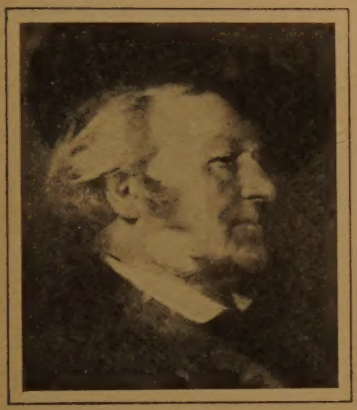
MAKERS OF MODERN OPERA

By H. E. KREHBIEL
Author and Music Critic



WAGNER

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DEPARTMENT OF
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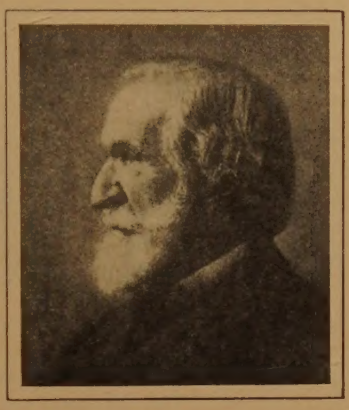


VERDI

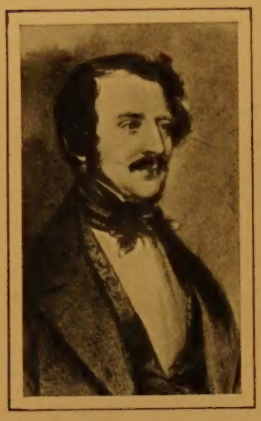
MENTOR GRAVURES

VERDI · PUCCINI · GOUNOD
MASSENET · STRAUSS · HUMPERDINCK

THE form of entertainment called opera had its origin a little more than three centuries ago in an effort made by a company of scholars and musical amateurs in Florence to rescue music from the artificiality into which the composers, who were all churchmen, had forced it.

The Florentine group had convinced themselves by study that music had been effectively linked with poetry and action in the Greek stage-plays, and in striving to imitate these they created the art-form which in time came to be called "opera"—though at first it was known by names all more or less closely connected with the terms which the composers of today use to describe their dramatic works,—lyric dramas, musical dramas, and so forth. The new style quickly spread over Europe, and inasmuch as Italy was the home of music, it retained for a time the Italian language and the style of musical composition evolved by its creators. Soon other nations, impelled by a desire to hear the new lyric plays, began to translate the Italian books into their own languages. This brought with it a recognition of the incongruity between Italian music and the French, German, and English languages, and the dramatic poets and musicians of these countries began to seek more satisfactory idioms in which to express their ideals. Thus there came into existence the three great schools of operatic composers whose latterday representatives are here considered.

Two men mark the point of departure of the lyric drama of today from the general style which characterized opera all the world over during



GAETANO DONIZETTI

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

the first two centuries following its invention. They are Verdi (vair-dee), the Italian, and Wagner (vahg'-ner), the German; and, strangely enough, they were both born in 1813. The latter exercised an influence which was universal, and Verdi fell under it.

THE GLORY OF VERDI

But neither in precept nor in practice was the great Italian brought to disavow the native genius of his people. That is the great glory of Verdi. For decade after decade he kept pace with his German rival in the march toward truthfulness and variety of expression in the lyric drama; but never did he forget that the first, the elemental, appeal which music makes is through melody. His conception of melody changed as his artistic nature grew and ripened; but song, vocal melody, is as dominant a factor in his first successful opera, "Nabuco," performed in 1842, as it is in "Falstaff," which he gave to the world fifty-one years later. Verdi's music illustrates every step of progress which Italian opera has taken, from the time when Rossini overcame the taste formed by the last masters of the eighteenth century till the advent of the impetuous champions of realism who disputed popularity with him in the closing years of the nineteenth. His ideals when he wrote "Oberto" in 1839 were those of his immediate predecessors, Bellini (bel-lee'-nee) and Donizetti (don-nee-dzet'-tee); but his voice was ruder,—so rude, indeed, as to lead Rossini (ros-see'-nee) to describe him as a "musician with a helmet." This rudeness was the first expression of his desire for passionate and truthful expression, a desire which at the height of his spontaneous creative powers reached its finest flower in the final trio of "Il Trovatore" and final quartet of "Rigoletto," two examples of operatic writing which are as good in their way as any that French or German opera has to show.

It is no depreciation of the mature and perfect Verdi of "Otello" and "Falstaff" to say

VERDI'S BIRTHPLACE AND HIS HOME

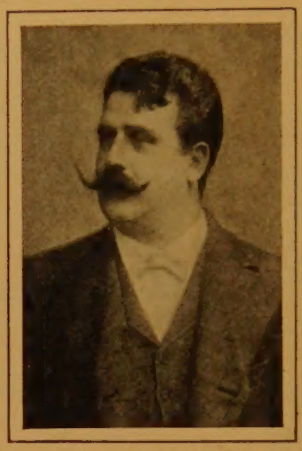
GIUSEPPI VERDI
From a painting by Millicovitz.

LA SCALA OPERA HOUSE
Where many of Verdi's works had their first performance.

that he reached the climax of his melodic inventiveness in "Il Trovatore" (tro-vah--to′-re), "Traviata" (trah-vee-ah′-tah), and "Rigoletto" (ree-go-let′-to), and that "Aïda" (ah-ee′-dah), which is now his most universally admired work, is such because it is a product of his combined melodic inspiration and his marvelous judgment, skill, and taste, developed by study and reflection. The greater charm which "Aïda" exerts now is due as much to the advanced ideals of the public, which Wagner was largely instrumental in creating, as to the refined and deepened sense of dramatic propriety and beauty which Verdi discloses in its melody, harmony, and instrumentation.

If his mind was more impetuous in the sixth decade of the last century than in the tenth, it was of infinitely finer fiber at the last. When his creative impulses came to wait upon reflection his music showed much nicer adjustment of the poetical and musical elements than had prevailed in his works thitherto, his harmonies became richer, the blatancy of his orchestration disappeared, and his instruments became more beautiful and truthful associates in expression with the singers of the drama than they had ever been. When he reached "Falstaff" and "Otello" the last bit of slag which had vulgarized his earlier works was cast aside, and he stepped forth as full an exemplar of national art as Wagner. In this last incarnation of the Italian spirit he was helped by his collaborator Boito (bo-ee′-to), a poet as well as a composer, and therefore a type of the true dramatic artist as he existed in ancient Greece, and as Wagner conceived

PIETRO MASCAGNI
Composer of Cavalleria Rusticana.



RUGGIERO LEONCAVALLO
Composer of Pagliacci.

him when he projected his Artwork of the Future. It was Verdi's association with Boito which was largely responsible for the fact that he became the successor as he had been the predecessor of Mascagni (mahs-kahn′-yee).

After the death of Verdi nobody was readier to concede how much he had meant to Italian art than Mascagni, who had been the first to profit by the revolt against Verdi which came with the advent of Wagner's art in Italy. When "Lohengrin" (lo′-en-grin) made its way into Florence and other places many pupils at the conservatories forsook Verdi and followed Wagner. The effect may have been a good one. There can scarcely be a doubt but that it was to turn his hotheaded young countrymen back to the path which he knew to be the only correct one for them that Verdi made his supreme effort in his last two works. Under the new influence the young Italians had plunged headforemost into realism of the crassest sort, and that they might follow a vulgar bent for lurid expression they went to the Neapolitan slums for their subjects.

REALISM IN OPERA

Some of the first fruits of the tendency toward realism are plays whose plots can scarcely be narrated without moral and even physical nausea. Compared with them Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" (kah-vahl-lay-ree′-ah rus-tee-kah′-nah) and Leoncavallo's (lay-own-kah-vahl′-o) "Pagliacci" (pahl-yah′-chee) are sweet and sane. After the taste for hot blood had been measurably satiated and the failure of scores of operas in which lurid orchestration, violent shriekings, and rough harmonies had supplanted

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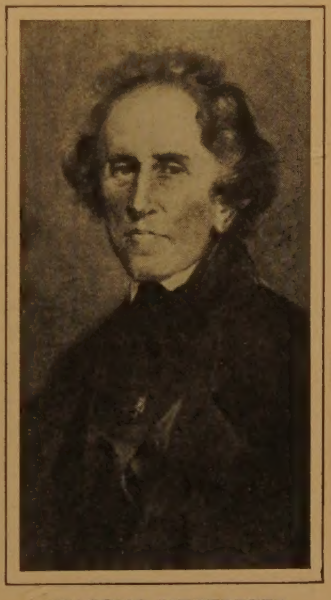
GIACOMO PUCCINI

the old national ideal there came back again the reign of dramatic melody, albeit in a new form, as we have it in the works of Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Puccini (poot-chee′-nee).

Puccini's operas are not entirely purged of artistic coarseness (as witness "Tosca" and "The Girl of the Golden West"); but he has been true to his Italian mission as a melodist, and has besides widened the Italian canvas to receive the new element of local color, which is an essential element in "Madame Butterfly," the most extraordinary feature of which is the degree in which such stubborn material as Japanese melody has been made to yield up a charm which it does not at all possess in its native state.

Fifty years ago, so far as Americans were concerned, French opera was practically summed up in "Les Huguenots" and "Faust." Meyerbeer (my′-er-bare) was not a Frenchman, but the embodiment of merely sensuous tendencies which belonged no more to one people than to another, but which found its fittest expression in the glamour of Parisian life. That Gounod (goo-no′) should have prevailed against these tendencies is to the great credit of the man and the people from whose loins he was sprung.



GIACOMO MEYERBEER
1791—1864
Composer of Les Huguenots.

GOUNOD'S MUSIC

Amiability was as marked a characteristic of Gounod's music as it was of his personality. He was graceful and winning, but not strong. He was an emotionalist and a mystic. When his expression of passion ran out into ecstasy he was at his best, and he could give expression to an emotional state better than he could depict its development. Essentially, therefore, he was a lyrical rather than a dramatic composer. The two most perfect products of his genius both disclose the climax of their beauty in scenes wherein ecstatic utterance asserts its right. The gems in Gounod's crown are the garden scene of "Faust" and the balcony scene of "Roméo et Juliette." Critics have placed a high estimate upon the latter opera, and the lovers of sentimental church music are fond of Gounod's religious ballads (they are nothing else), one or two of his masses, and the oratorio "The Redemption"; but to the historian and the people of the future it is not likely that he will be more than the composer of "Faust," an opera which has a history that is unique in operatic annals. It had been in the repertory of the Théâtre Lyrique ten years when it was transferred to the Académie Nationale (or Grand Opera, as it is popularly called) in 1869. When the

transfer was made it had already been performed four hundred times in Paris, and before Gounod died in 1893 it had been performed nearly seven hundred times more. No opera has had a record comparable with this, and there is yet no evidence of loss of popularity in France, England, or America.

As a musician Gounod may be described as an eclectic. Though his genius was essentially lyrical, his models were the kings of dramatic music,—Mozart, Weber (vay′-ber) and Wagner. To his love for the first of these he raised a lovely monument in a book on "Don Giovanni" (jo-vahn′-nee), which opera, he said, had influenced his whole life like a revelation, and had remained from the beginning the embodiment of dramatic perfection. He was one of the first of Wagner's disciples in France; but his lyrical trend did not permit him to follow the German poet-composer to the logical outcome of his theories. Wagner's influence upon him stopped with "Lohengrin." Thereafter, as Gounod himself expressed it, he and Wagner traveled in diametrically opposite directions, he seeking to grow more simple in his manner and more desirous to achieve his ends by unaffected means and truthfulness of feeling. At the end he was disposed to consider Wagner an aberration of genius, a visionary haunted by the colossal, unable longer to estimate aright his own intellectual powers, one who had lost the sense of proportion.

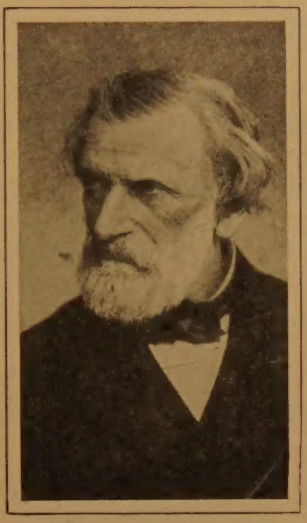
CHARLES FRANCOIS GOUNOD
1818—1893.

GOUNOD'S RESIDENCE IN PARIS

So far as American people are concerned the operatic Gounod lives only in "Faust" and "Roméo et Juliette." There have been a few fitful per-

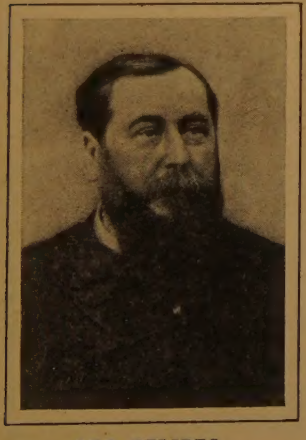
formances of "Mireille" (mee-ray′) and "Philémon et Baucis" (Anglicized: fy-lee-mon and baw-sis); but all the other operas on his list are a blank.

Very different is the case of the most popular of his successors, Massenet (mahs-nay′); though it is more than likely that he too will become a two-opera man. Massenet is the most popular of Gounod's successors, but not the greatest. A greater musical dramatist than he was Bizet (bee-zay′); a greater musician and almost also as prolific an opera writer was, or is, Saint-Saëns (sahng-song′). These two men are represented in current opera lists by a single opera each; but of Massenet's works New Yorkers have heard no less than eleven,—"Werther" (vare-ter) and "Manon" (mah-nong′), which are likely to endure, and "Le Cid" (lay sid), "La Navarraise," "Le jongleur de Notre-Dame" (translated: The juggler of no′-tr dahm), "Thaïs" (tah-ees′), "Hérodiade," "Sapho" (sah-fo′), "Grisélidis," and "Cendrillon" (sang-dri-yong′) which are not likely to endure long.



AMBROISE THOMAS
Composer of Mignon.

CAMILLE SAINT SAËNS
Composer of Samson and Delilah.



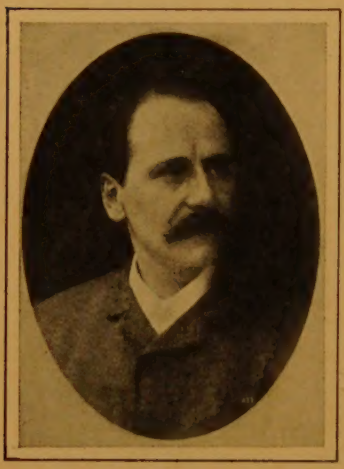
LEO DELIBES
Composer of Lakme.

THE QUALITY OF MASSENET

So many operas ought to speak well of Massenet's versatility, as it surely does of his productiveness and industry; but the individuality of this composer, which is incontestable, is an individuality of style which leans heavily on sameness. The French wits who thought it clever to dub him "Mademoiselle Wagner" twenty years ago never got the opportunity to call him *Madame* Wagner. He never grew up to that estate. He did not grow older in thought or riper in creative ability; but only more facile in expression.

All of Massenet's operas are essentially illustrative of the sentimental spirit of French art. Whether Gounod attempts to write an oratorio on so sublime a subject as the fall and redemption

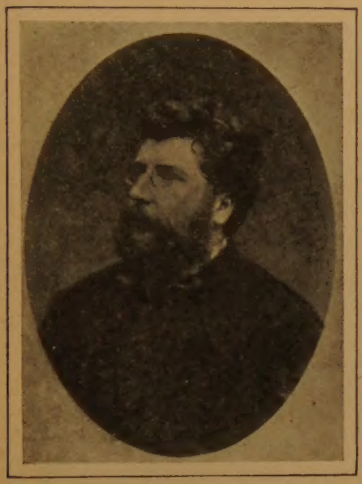
of man, or Massenet tries to picture the touching faith and piety of an honest mountebank, it is all one: the music is bound to run out into a strain of religious balladry. But French music as represented by Gounod and Massenet is ingenuous also in its persistent pursuit of beauty. The northern ideal of strength before beauty, or truth before convention, is not for the French, with their devotion to elegance of utterance, and this fact has saved their lyric stage from the deplorable tendency exhibited by the most notable, and probably greatest, German composer since Wagner, namely, Richard Strauss (strous). Oscar Wilde, though English, wrote his "Salomé" in French; but it had to wait for the coming of a German for a musical glorification of its morbid attraction toward dead bodies. Nor is Electra's bestial ferocity, as pictured by Hoffmansthal and Strauss, likely soon to find favor among the French. Thus much must be said in favor of the artistic tendency of a people who are still willing to hark back to a miracle-tale like that of "Our Lady's Juggler," or to a legend like that of "The Patient Grizel," for operatic material.



JULES MASSENET, 1842-1913

MASSENET IN HIS STUDIO IN 1891

Between Gounod and Massenet there stands at least one French dramatic composer who accomplished much, but promised more in respect of the development of the lyric drama. Bizet's "Carmen" has won heartier recognition in Germany than even Gounod's "Faust." Perhaps the qualities which conquered this distinction were against it when it first appeared in its native land. It may have been a feeling of its approach to an extra-national ideal which made the French people, who with all their enthusiasm for art are yet strongly predisposed in favor of their own ideals, scent an objectionable Teutonism in "Carmen" and give it only tardy recognition; perhaps also more than a touch of jealous patriotism.

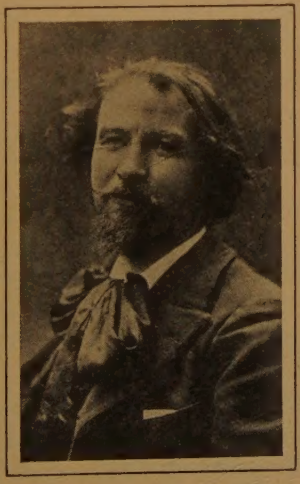


GEORGES BIZET—1838-1875
Composer of Carmen.

The Franco-Prussian War had a twofold effect upon music in France,—it threw the people back upon an appreciation of some of their own composers,—Berlioz (bear-lee-oze), for instance,—and also turned them against not only the German, but also all of their own composers in whom they thought they recognized German influences. The feeling was not only strong to taboo Wagner, but everybody in whose music they scented *Wagnerisme*. Their conception of the term was amusingly vague. They did not recognize it in the freedom of form manifested in "Faust"; but felt it in the truthful and forceful dramatic expression which marked "Carmen," and especially in Bizet's use of the typical phrase, the *Leitmotiv*. Wagnerism had to be purged by time before Charpentier (shahr-pong-tee-ay) could triumph with "Louise," and Debussy (day-boos-see′) with "Pelléas et Mélisande" (pale-lay-ahs′ ay may-lee-sahnd′), works in which the Wagnerian system is much more extensively and frankly used than in "Carmen."

THE INFLUENCE OF WAGNER

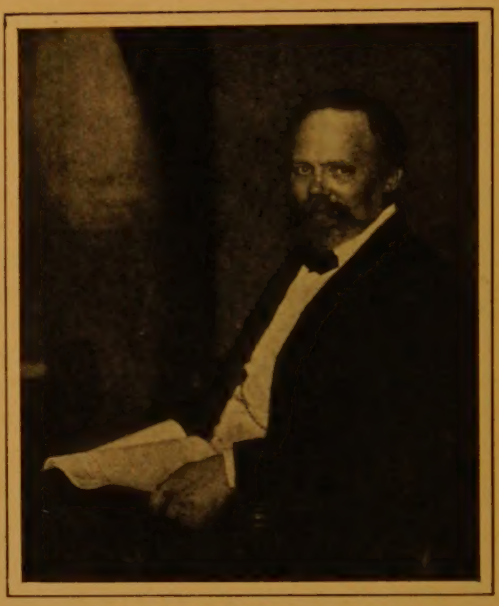
French, German, Italian, Russian, and English composers have for half a century been under the domination of Wagner's influence. In France and Italy he put a new spirit into opera; but the composers did not attempt to follow him slavishly in both practice and precept. In Germany, on the other hand, many of his disciples made the attempt and failed. Two only have created living works—Engelbert Humperdinck (hoom′-per-dingk) and Richard Strauss. The more interesting phenomenon of the two is presented by Humperdinck, who has not only



GUSTAVE CHARPENTIER
Composer of Louise.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Composer of Pelléas et Mélisande.

applied Wagner's theories to the musical score of his masterpiece, "Hänsel und Gretel" (hen′-zeloont gray′-tel), but has extended their application to dramatic material.



ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK

HUMPERDINCK AND WAGNER

Wagner held myth to be the best subject for the lyric drama; Humperdinck has extended the principle to include fairy tales, which, in a sense, may be said to be decayed myths. Taking the German form of the story of the Babes in the Wood, he has turned it into an opera which illustrates the methods Wagner employed in his great mythological tragedy, "The Nibelung's Ring," and has given the methods a peculiar charm by making his musical symbols (*Leitmotiven*) out of nursery jingles and tunes like them. Notwithstanding that he was thus hewing to a line drawn by another, the opera has a melodic fluency and freshness which have scarcely a parallel in modern opera. A later work "Königskinder" (Royal Children), though full of beauty, lacks the spontaneity and charm of its predecessor largely because its book is stilted in language, its symbolism too much in evidence and not sufficiently sympathetic, and its construction faulty.

RICHARD STRAUSS

RICHARD STRAUSS

Richard Strauss reflects the tendency of the times away from all ideal things. Physical, moral, and mental degeneracy are the subjects which he has attempted to glorify in "Salomé" and "Elektra," and shameless immorality in "Rosenkavalier" (ro′-zen-kahv-ah-leer′). To the celebration of such things and to the promotion of his material interests he is prostituting the finest musical gifts possessed by any composer known to the present day.

Not all the men who deserve to be called makers of modern opera have been mentioned

as yet. There are Frenchmen whose works have shown more vitality than those of Charpentier and Debussy, though these two, representing a more individual tendency, are generally singled out for comment when the talk is of latter-day men.

OTHER MODERN COMPOSERS

There is still a strong feeling among the lovers of French opera for Ambroise Thomas because of his "Mignon," and Delibes because of his "Lakmé" and his ballets. The dramatic, or pantomimic, dance is getting a stronger hold on the stage every day, and nothing has yet been produced in this line more graceful or in all artistic elements more elegant than "Coppélia." Saint-Saëns's "Samson et Delilah," though better fitted for the concert-room than the theater, has also won its way to recognition in America and England; while Germany, forgetting that Berlioz was pitted against Wagner by the characteristic spirit after the Franco-Prussian War, continues to pay deep respect to "Benvenuto Cellini." Wolf-Ferrari, half German, half Italian, has fought his way to the fore with two works in which his genius shows at its best ("Il Segreto di Susanna" and "Le Donne Curiose"), and lately a Russian, Moussorgsky, has come crashing through the veneer of conventional art with his "Boris Godounov" in a way which justifies the cry raised long ago by this writer in the concert-room: "Beware of the Muscovite!"

ERMANO WOLF-FERRARI
Composer of The Jewels of The Madonna.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

CHAPTERS OF OPERA
By H. E. Krehbiel.

A BOOK OF OPERAS
By H. E. Krehbiel.

Mr. Krehbiel's books are admirable commentaries, written with authority and in a most readable style.

MEMOIRS OF THE OPERA
By George Hogarth.

A standard work long recognized.

HISTORY OF THE OPERA
By Sutherland Edwards.

A valuable work by an English authority.

THE LYRICAL DRAMA
By H. Sutherland Edwards.

THE OPERA, PAST AND PRESENT
By W. F. Apthorp.

Brilliant writing and critical taste characterize Mr. Apthorp's work.

SOME FORERUNNERS OF MODERN OPERA
By W. J. Henderson.

A thoughtful, scholarly and well written book.

THE STANDARD OPERA
By George P. Upton.

An excellent book by a well known Chicago critic.

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Editorial

The new year is here and with it the forward look. It is the time for announcements, and the magazines of the day are filled with them. The Mentor Association does not lay down a definite and fixed program for a year ahead, week by week. It is important that our schedule should be elastic. But we want our readers to know the plans of The Mentor for 1914, and so we print herewith a list containing some of the subjects scheduled. The articles may not appear in the exact order of this list. Definite dates will be announced later. We print the list for the purpose of giving our readers an idea of the scope and variety of the year's program.

★ ★ ★

TWO EARLY GERMAN PAINTERS, DÜRER AND HOLBEIN. Portrait of Himself, Dürer; Portrait of Young Woman, Dürer; Hieronymus Holzschuher, Dürer; Erasmus, Holbein; The Meier Madonna, Holbein; Queen Jane Seymour, Holbein. By Professor F. J. Mather, Princeton University.

VIENNA, THE QUEEN CITY. Palace from Gardens Schönbrunn, Votive Church, Reichsrats Gebäude, Old Vienna, Maria Theresa Monument, Hoch Brunnen Fountains and Prince's Palace. By Dwight L. Elmendorf.

ANCIENT ATHENS. Parthenon, The Acropolis, Mars Hill (Areopagus), Theseum, Stadium, Theater of Dionysius. By Professor George Willis Botsford, Columbia University.

THE BARBIZON PAINTERS. Evening, by Daubigny; The Holy Family, Diaz; Meadow Bordered by Trees, Rousseau; Landscape with Sheep, Jacque; The Wild Oak, Dupré; The Gleaners, Millet. By Arthur Hoeber.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN. Lincoln, the Boy, Lincoln as a Rail Splitter or Flatboat Man, the Douglas Debates, President Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, Assassination. By Professor Albert Bushnell Hart, Harvard University.

MEXICO. Mexico City, The Cathedral, The Palace, Popocatapetl, Chapultepec, Scenic View. By Frederick Palmer, Author and Journalist.

GEORGE WASHINGTON. The Surveyor, Braddock's Army, Taking Command of American Army, Valley Forge, Farewell Address, Inauguration as President. By Professor Robert McNutt McElroy, Princeton University.

AMERICAN PROSE WRITERS. Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, James Kirke Paulding. By Hamilton W. Mabie.

COURT PAINTERS OF FRANCE. Parnassus, Claude Lorrain; The French Comedy, Watteau; Shepherds in Arcadia, Poussin; Louis XIV, Rigaud; Marie Leczinska (wife of Louis XIV) Van Loo; Music Lesson, Lancret. By W. A. Coffin.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONTANA. Morning Eagle Falls, Shore Line of Lake St. Mary, Iceberg Lake, Two Medicine Camp on Two Medicine Lake, McDermott Falls, Gunsight Lake and Mount Jackson. By William T. Hornaday.

GRECIAN MASTERPIECES. Venus de Milo, Disk Thrower, The Three Fates, From Parthenon Pediment; Samothracian Victory, Hermes, Pericles.

EARLY ENGLISH POETS. Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, William Cowper. By Hamilton W. Mabie.

FLEMISH MASTERS OF PAINTING. Rubens and Isabella Brandt, Rubens; The Lion Hunt, Rubens; Helene Fourment and Daughter, Rubens; Duke of Buckingham with Horse, by Van Dyck; William II of Orange and His Bride, Van Dyck; Duke of Richmond and Lenox, Van Dyck. By Professor John C. Van Dyke.

HISTORIC AMERICAN HIGHWAYS. Boone's Wilderness Road, Cumberland Road, Braddock's Road, Old Natchez Trail, Sante Fé Trail, Oregon Trail. By H. Addington Bruce.

Other subjects for the year are as follows:

BERLIN. By Dwight L. Elmendorf.

MASTERS OF THE PIANO. By Henry T. Finck.

AMERICAN POETS OF THE SOIL. By Burges Johnson.

FAMOUS AMERICAN WOMEN PAINTERS. By Arthur Hoeber.

OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS. By E. H. Forbush.

HOLLAND. By Dwight L. Elmendorf.

THE CONQUEST OF THE AIR. By Henry Woodhouse.

FATHERS OF THE CONSTITUTION. By Professor Albert Bushnell Hart.

THE CELESTIAL WORLD.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN HOMES.

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★ ★ ★

These titles are not representative of all the departments in the interesting course that The Mentor is developing. Had we four times the space we could fill it with equally attractive features. What we print, however, will afford some idea of the wealth of material that has been planned for early publication.

GIUSEPPE VERDI

ONE

THE last and greatest of the old school of Italian opera composers, and one of the most popular of all opera composers in the world, was Giuseppe Verdi (joo-sep'-pe ver'-dee). He was born of humble parentage in the little Italian village of Roncole on October 10, 1813. His parents kept a tavern, which they combined with a general village store. It was situated in a neighborhood of ignorant laborers. Little chance was there in that spot for a budding genius in music. Verdi's art instinct had to feed on slim nourishment, like a stray seed blown among rocks; but, like the stray seed, his genius took root even in that arid soil. His love of music was shown by his following an itinerant fiddler round the village. His father, detecting his taste, got him a mediocre piano, on which young Verdi practised vigorously.

When ten years old he played the organ in the village church, and at last a patron provided him with the means to go to Milan. When he applied for admission to the conservatory he was rejected, on the score that he had no aptitude for music. He stayed in Milan, however, as a pupil of Vincenzo La Vigna (vin-chen'-zo la veen'-yah), with whom he remained until 1833. He married in 1832, and in 1838 returned to Milan, where he wrote his first opera, "Oberto." This did not prove a success; but it was the beginning of a famous career.

Verdi's first success was achieved in 1843, when he brought out "I Lombardi." It was followed the next year by "Ernani," and with that work his reputation was firmly established. A number of operas followed, some successful, others failures. But in 1851 began the period during which "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore," and "La Traviata" appeared, and then all Europe rang with his praises.

Verdi was not only the most popular operatic composer of the nineteenth century, but the wonder of the musical world. His art life might be divided into three parts. His first operas were of the old-fashioned "honey-sweet" Italian type, in which the airs were tunefully sentimental, and the orchestra played a "guitar" accompaniment.

The middle period showed quite a definite advance in dramatic vigor, in fullness of musical expression, and in richness of orchestral technic. Of this period "Aida" is a notable example. Then, in his ripe old age, Verdi revealed an amazing growth in musical power. He had advanced through the years as the art of operatic composition had advanced. His opera "Otello" showed that he had studied and mastered the newer works of his day, and that he held a leading place even with younger composers. "Falstaff," his last opera, was a revelation of extraordinary fertility and virility in an artist of advanced age. It established Verdi's reputation for all time as a composer of music drama as his earliest works had shown his skill in tuneful opera. The music score of "Falstaff" is as free and untrammeled as the work of any modern composer, even Richard Wagner himself.

Verdi lived until he was eighty-eight years old, enjoyed a happy home, quiet pleasures, and the admiration not only of his own country but of all the world. He died at Milan in 1901, having left twenty-nine operas, most of which were notably successful.

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JULES E. F. MASSENET

MAKERS OF MODERN OPERA

Jules Émile Frédéric Massenet

TWO

MASSENET, one of the most renowned French composers, was born at Montaud, May 12, 1842. Like nearly all French musicians, he began his study in the French Conservatory. He was so poor in his early days that he had to help pay his living expenses by playing the kettledrum in a café orchestra. He carried off several minor prizes during his student days, and finally in 1863 secured the prize of Rome, and this despite the fact that the head of the conservatory at first tried to exclude him on the ground that he had no musical ability. On returning from Rome in 1867 he produced his first opera, a one-act affair which achieved only moderate success. He served in the Franco-Prussian War, and his impressions received there found musical expression in his study "Alsaciennes" and his one-act opera "Navarraise." After that time Massenet was industrious in composition, turning out operas every year or so. The wonder of it is that most of them have been successful and are a part of the operatic repertoire today.

From 1878 to 1896 he was a professor of composition at the Paris conservatory, and had under his tuition a number of pupils who have since become famous; Charpentier, the composer of "Louise," was one of them. His activities may be gathered from the fact that he has written more than twenty operas and five oratorios, together with incidental music to four dramas.

In 1878 he was elected a member of the Academy of Beaux Arts, an honor that he won over Saint-Saëns, who is reckoned a superior musician.

He died in Paris August 13, 1912.

Massenet has been called a puzzling personality in modern musical history. His subjects are chosen to suit a Parisian public, and yet they have been successful in foreign fields. His style has been called "weak and sugary," and his music "superficially clever." But in spite of that Massenet's music has lasted for years, and, however he may be criticized, his poetic sentiment and richly colored orchestration are emphatically suitable to the public taste.

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GIACOMO PUCCINI

THREE

GIACOMO PUCCINI (jah-ko′-mo poot-chee′-nee) was named by the great Verdi as his probable successor. That meant much from the lips of the venerable master, and the years are beginning to verify it. Puccini was born at Lucca, Italy, in June, 1858. He came from a long line of musicians, reaching as far back as his great-great-grandfather. In his own immediate family of six all were devoted to music, and Giacomo took to the art from his earliest years. He breathed it as he breathed the air of life. His precocity attracted the attention of the queen of Italy, who granted him a pension that enabled him to enter the Conservatory of Music at Milan.

His mind turned toward composition from earliest years, his dominating thought always being opera,—not old-fashioned opera of melody and empty orchestration, but opera of the modern sort, vibrant with life, vigorous in dramatic expression, and enriched with all the resources of modern orchestration. Ponchielli (pon-kee-el′-lee) was his chief instructor,—Ponchielli, the composer of "Gioconda" (jo-kon′-dah), who has been credited with inspiring the modern Italian school of composers.

Puccini's first opera, "Le Ville" (le veel), was produced in 1884. It created a favorable impression—that was all. In 1889 his opera "Edgar" appeared; but it was not popular. Four years later, however, "Manon Lescaut" (mah-nong′ les-ko′) was produced. This established his success. It required courage to go to the opera house with a new work on Manon. Massenet's "Manon" was known throughout the operatic world, where it had been made successful by the brilliant performances of Jean de Reszke and Sibyl Sanderson. But Puccini's "Manon" is of stronger stuff, and it holds its place today against the other.

It was the production of "La Bohème" (bo-hame′) in Turin in 1896 that made Puccini famous. "Tosca" followed in 1900, and in 1904 came the charming "Madame Butterfly." This beautiful opera was hissed by the Italians when it was first produced; a fact hard to understand today, when it has become a rival of "La Bohème" in the public's esteem. In 1910 Puccini produced his operatic setting of the American play, "The Girl of the Golden West." It was brought out in New York with a cast of great artists, including Caruso, Destinn and Amato. It has been produced a number of times, and holds an important place in the operatic repertoire. It is not, however, generally reckoned in popularity with "La Bohème" and "Madame Butterfly." These two charming works are masterpieces of art and sentiment.

Puccini has a rare gift of melody, strong imagination, skill in technic, and an unusual sense of orchestral color. He is considered the most gifted of the present representatives of Italian operatic art.

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RICHARD STRAUSS

FOUR

NO composer since Wagner's time has been the subject of more discussion than Richard Strauss. He has been called the champion of the "forward movement." Strauss came by his musical instincts naturally: he was the son of a horn player. His birth occurred in 1864, and he showed himself a prodigy from an early age.

He played the piano proficiently at four years, and produced a number of compositions when only six. He followed his musical studies with avidity and at the same time was attending public school. In 1885 he began to study music regularly under the tuition of the eminent pianist and conductor, Hans von Bülow (bue'-low), whom he succeeded later as head of the Meiningen orchestra.

It was Alexander Ritter that set Richard Strauss on the path of advanced music. Strauss resigned his conductorship after a few months, and in 1885 went to Italy. Before the year was over he was appointed third chapel master in Munich. Four years after that he took the position of director at Weimar. He held this post, however, for only a brief time; for in 1894 he married Pauline de Ahna, an eminent singer, who has accompanied him in concerts and has rendered great service to him by her interpretations of his songs.

For two years Strauss and his wife made tours throughout Europe. They came to the United States, where he gave concerts made up of his own compositions. In song and in opera composition he is regarded by some as a high priest of future art, and by others as merely a shock to the nerves.

The productions of his new operas have usually been the occasions of sensational interest. "Salomé" and "Elektra" both created a loud stir in the musical world. Many resent the bold and radical spirit of Richard Strauss. Perhaps we are all too near him. His enemies, or rather his severest critics, would say that anywhere within hearing of his operas would be too near. Many music students, however, find much to interest them in his work, and declare that Richard Strauss will come into his own in future years. His operas, for other reasons than their music, are not likely to be set in the regular repertoire of an opera season. His songs and tone poems, however, are already an accepted part of concert programs. In richness of orchestration, tremendous climaxes, vivid flashes of color, and frequent outbursts of dramatic power, there is nothing in modern music to place beside the tone poems of Richard Strauss.

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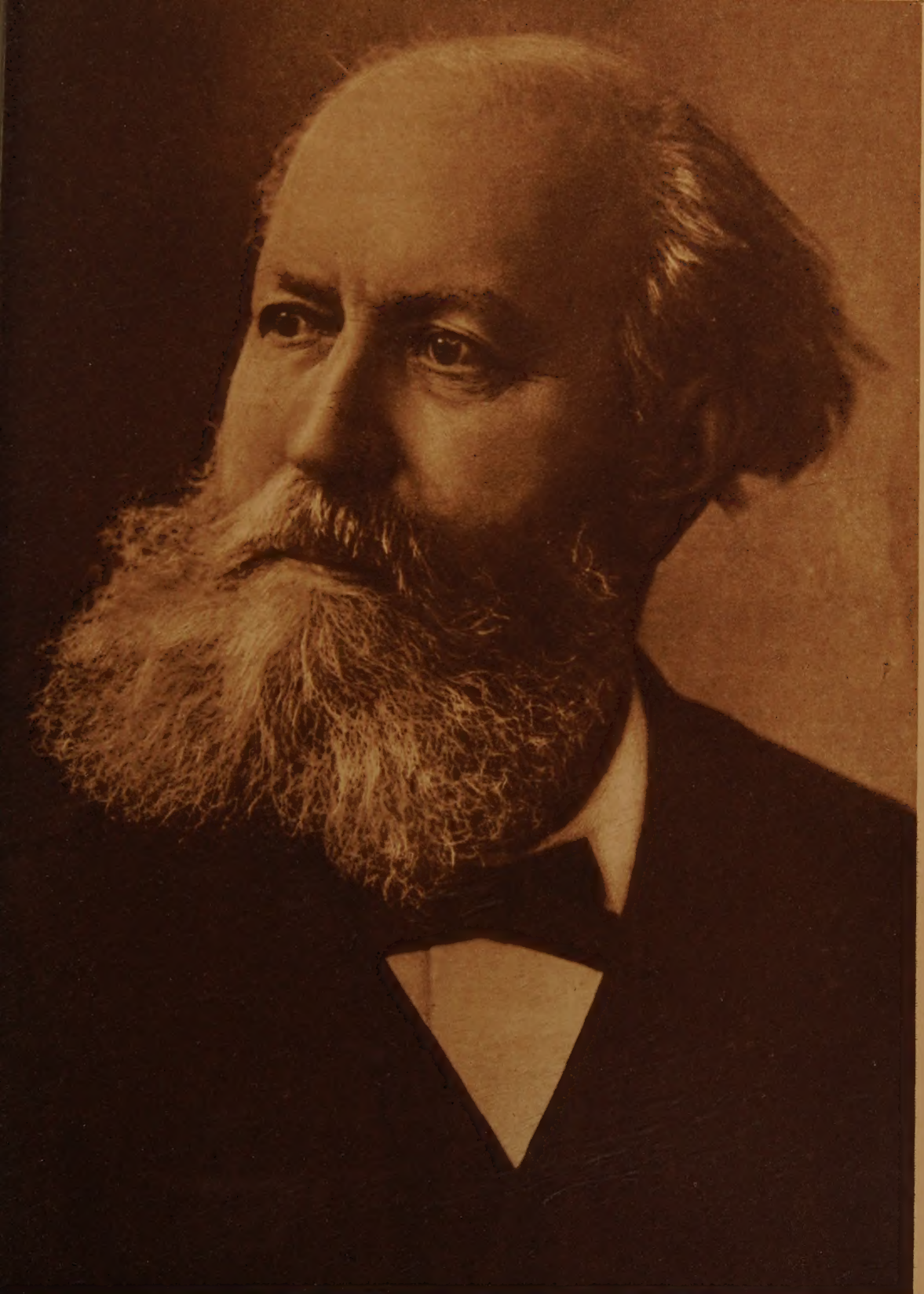

CHARLES FRANÇOIS GOUNOD

SIX

FEW composers have so suddenly sprung into fame and favor as Engelbert Humperdinck. He was born at Sigburg, Germany, in September, 1854. His musical education began in Cologne Conservatory under Hiller, and was continued in Munich under Lachner. The prizes that he won at the conservatory enabled him to go to Italy, where he met Richard Wagner at Naples, who recognized his ability and showed him many favors. Wagner took Humperdinck with him to Bayreuth and made an assistant of him. Humperdinck's services were most valuable in the production of Wagner's "Parsifal" in 1882. Subsequently he visited France and Spain, remaining two years in the latter country, teaching at Barcelona.

In 1887 he returned to Cologne, and shortly afterward taught music at Frankfort-on-the-Main. In 1896 the emperor secured for him an appointment as professor in Berlin, and Humperdinck moved there in 1900.

The compositions of Humperdinck are not numerous. His reputation, as far as the world at large is concerned, rests entirely on his masterpiece, "Hänsel und Gretel." Besides this opera, he wrote incidental music for "The Children of the King," a charming play of allegorical character, and the "Moorish Rhapsody," an orchestral piece. These two and a few other compositions are known chiefly to music lovers, and they uphold the reputation that Humperdinck obtained by his "Hänsel und Gretel."

The fairy opera, "Hänsel und Gretel," is known the world over, and well beloved wherever it is heard. Its success was phenomenal from the start, the story of the opera being captivating, and the music likewise. It came at a time when the attention of the operatic world was absorbed with some of the successors of the well known Italian school, prominently Mascagni and Leoncavallo. But the little opera struck a note much higher, and so much more beautiful that before the first season was over the Italian composers found their admirers listening to and singing the music of "Hänsel und Gretel," and leaving their intermezzi to the street organs. The eminent critic, Streatfield, pronounced Humperdinck "the first German composer of distinct individuality since Wagner." The close association with Wagner that Humperdinck enjoyed has shown its influence on the latter's music; but there is a spirit and a quality in it all his own.

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